

North Dakota's New Dove

Story and Photos by Mike Szymanski

In the last few years you may have noticed odd looking doves perched in your yard, zip-ping by a window, or even chasing grackles away from bird feeders. While many in North Dakota have reported these birds as ringed turtle doves, which actually are domesticated escapees, the new “magnum” sized doves are Eurasian collared doves.

Eurasian collared doves were accidentally introduced in the Bahamas in the mid-1970s when about 50 of the birds escaped from a pet trader. The birds soon spread northward, and by the early 1980s had established a breeding population in Florida. The birds are known for their prodigious ability to invade and colonize new areas and have no known constraints on dispersal.

In the 1930s, their European range was limited to the Balkans and Turkey. However, by the mid-1950s, Eurasian collared doves had colonized most of Europe and reached as far north as the British Isles. Within 10 years, their abundance had exceeded that of native turtledoves.

The dispersal strategy of Eurasian collared doves could be classified as leapfrogging, where birds may disperse several hundred miles in a single movement and then backfill areas previously skipped. Urban areas generally are colonized first, followed by rural areas.

The first sightings of Eurasian collared doves in North Dakota were in the late 1990s, but reports of these birds are increasing, especially south of Interstate 94. In mid-August, I saw 27 in Burleigh County. There were young birds in the group, evidence that Eurasian collared doves are reproducing in North Dakota.

Differentiating Eurasian collared doves from native mourning doves is straight-

forward. The newcomers are about half-again the size of mourning doves and are more robust. Eurasian collared doves are also considerably lighter in color, have a more squared-off tail, and sport a thin black ring on their neck.

Their calls also differ in that Eurasian collared doves have a monotonous call (*koo-KOO-kook*) that is repeated upward of 12 times, whereas mourning doves have a low, mournful (*coo-oo oo oo oo*) call. Eurasian collared doves also use an excitement or alighting call (*hwaah*) that is harsh and nasally, which is often given as birds alight, or when males chase other birds from their territories.

North Dakota is on the northern edge of the expansion zone inhabited by Eurasian collared doves, but there have been cases of birds breeding in the state. Because they are new arrivals, Eurasian collared doves are not as widespread or found in concentrations seen in some southern states, although they are seen regularly in some areas.

Given that Eurasian collared doves are an exotic with unknown consequences to other species, most states employ some form of bag limit, sometimes separately or in aggregate, with other dove species. In North Dakota, Eurasian collared doves shot in fall will simply be a part of the hunter's daily dove bag limit.

While effects of Eurasian collared doves on native mourning doves are unknown, one thing is for sure, these birds are not going away anytime soon. Will these new “magnum” doves out-compete less aggressive native mourning doves, or will they simply fill an available niche – perhaps the one vacated by the now extinct passenger pigeon? Only time will tell.



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Eurasian collared doves were first spotted in North Dakota in the late 1990s. There have been only three reports of white-winged doves, below, in North Dakota.

White-winged Doves

White-winged doves have also been expanding their range since the 1970s. These doves were once uncommon north of southern Texas and in parts of southern Arizona. In the past 20 years, white-winged doves have expanded their range north and east, and can now be seen on a fairly regular basis in Oklahoma, Arkansas and Florida, and irregularly in northern areas such as Nova Scotia, Canada.

There have been only three reports of white-winged doves in North Dakota – one each in Fargo, Minot and Hettinger this spring. Additionally, one was shot in 2004 during the South Dakota dove season about 20 miles southwest of Forbes, North Dakota.

In North Dakota, white-winged doves shot in fall will also simply be a part of the hunter's daily dove bag limit.

White-winged doves are slightly larger and have a more squared-off tail than mourning doves. And, unlike the North Dakota native, white-winged doves sport a white patch on the outer edge of their wings.



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